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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

JCSM-171-68

21 MAR 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: PRAIRIE FIRE - Intelligence Net

1. (U) Reference is made to:

a. COMUSMACV message to CINCPAC, 150407Z January 1968 (JCS IN 36859).

b. CINCPAC message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 060115Z March 1968 (JCS IN 53073).

2. The southeastern panhandle of Laos continues to be dominated by North Vietnamese forces and to serve as the principal infiltration route and support area for enemy operations in South Vietnam. The avowed neutrality of Laos and the US desire to conform as closely as possible to the provisions of the Geneva Accords have limited friendly activity in the area to PRAIRIE FIRE reconnaissance and exploitation missions, air operations, and some CAS road watch teams. Our operations have been hampered by the lack of an adequate intelligence gathering capability in the PRAIRIE FIRE area. Therefore, the search has continued for new or improved concepts to deal with the problem without a drastic shift in policy toward Laos and without upsetting that country's political and military balance.

3. During the conduct of PRAIRIE FIRE operations over the past months, COMUSMACV's Studies and Observations Group has identified and assessed a potential for the development of a native intelligence net in the PRAIRIE FIRE operational area. This potential exists within tribal groups which inhabit the area and are being exploited by the enemy. Past experience with Montagnard groups in Southeast Asia has shown that these people will respond to US influence and can be developed into intelligence assets. Such a program could provide an important supplement to ongoing PRAIRIE FIRE activities at a low cost in men and materiel and with a low risk of embarrassing the neutralist Government of Laos.

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4. (S) CINCPAC has endorsed (reference 1b) a COMUSMACV request (reference 1a) that authority be granted to contact, train, and employ tribal groups in the PRAIRIE FIRE area as intelligence assets. This plan would permit the creation of intelligence nets which would be permanently in place in the operational area and could substantially improve our knowledge of enemy activity and our interdiction effort. Initial efforts to develop this capability can be undertaken with existing personnel and funds available in the PRAIRIE FIRE program.

5. (S) The Joint Chiefs of Staff have examined the proposed concept and consider that this course of action should be pursued.

6. (S) Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that:

a. Authority be granted to recruit cooperative natives in the PRAIRIE FIRE area for intelligence collection, to extract willing individuals to SVN for training, and to return the trained personnel to their home areas to establish and expand intelligence nets.

b. A memorandum, substantially as contained in Appendix A, be forwarded to the Secretary of State.

7. (U) Upon receipt of your approval, the message in Appendix B will be dispatched.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

*Earle G. Wheeler*

EARLE G. WHEELER  
Chairman

Joint Chiefs of Staff

Attachments

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APPENDIX A

DRAFT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Subject: PRAIRIE FIRE - Intelligence Nets (C)

1. ( ) The southeastern panhandle of Laos continues to be dominated by North Vietnamese forces and to serve as the principal infiltration route and support area for enemy operations in South Vietnam. The avowed neutrality of Laos and the US desire to conform as closely as possible to the provisions of the Geneva Accords have limited friendly activity in the area to PRAIRIE FIRE reconnaissance and exploitation missions, air operations, and some CAS road watch teams. Our operations have been hampered by the lack of an adequate intelligence gathering capability in the PRAIRIE FIRE area. Therefore, the search has continued for new or improved concepts to deal with the problem without a drastic shift in US policy toward Laos and without upsetting the country's political and military balance.
2. ( ) During the conduct of PRAIRIE FIRE operations over the past months, COMUSMACV's Studies and Observations Group has identified and assessed a potential for the development of a native intelligence net in the PRAIRIE FIRE operational area. This potential exists within tribal groups which inhabit the area and are being exploited by the enemy. Past experience with Montagnard groups in Southeast Asia has shown that these people will respond to US influence and can be developed

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into intelligence assets. Such a program could provide an important supplement to the ongoing PRAIRIE FIRE activities at a low cost in men and material and with a low risk of embarrassing the neutralist Government of Laos.

3. (TOP SECRET) The Joint Chiefs of Staff have therefore proposed that COMUSMACV be authorized to recruit cooperative natives in the PRAIRIE FIRE area for intelligence collection; to extract willing individuals to SVN for training; and to return the trained personnel to their home areas to establish and expand intelligence nets.

4. (TOP SECRET) I have examined the proposed concept and consider that this course of action should be pursued.

5. (U) Prior to taking any action on this matter, I would appreciate your views.

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APPENDIX B

DRAFT

FROM: JCS	Ref a is JCS	DISTRIBUTION
TO: CINCPAC	IN 36859	SECDEF J-3
INFO: COMUSMACV	Ref b is JCS	ASD/ISA SACSA
AMEMB SAIGON	IN 53073	STATE DIA
AMEMB VIENTIANE		CJCS CNO
		DJS CSAF
		SJCS CMC
		CSA

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Subj: PRAIRIE FIRE (U)

Refs: a. COMUSMACV msg 150407Z Jan 68

b. CINCPAC msg 060115Z Mar 68

1. (U) Authority is granted to establish intelligence 1  
nets in the PRAIRIE FIRE area. This includes authorization 2  
to recruit cooperative natives, to extract willing 3  
individuals to SVN for training, and to return the 4  
trained personnel to their home areas to establish 5  
and expand intelligence nets. 6
2. (U) Request that information regarding progress 7  
of this activity be included in normal PRAIRIE FIRE 8  
progress and weekly reports. 9
3. (U) State concurs. GP-1 10

Writer:  
Colonel R. B. Rheault, USA  
Special Operations Division, SACSA  
Extension 55078

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